THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

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Our third year commences with this newsletter. Many of you have been with us from the beginning - and our first issue. We have gotten to know quite a number of subscribers to this newsletter over this period. We feel that we know many more of you from your letters. When the triumvirate of Fisher, Kinnear and MacInnes sit down every month and go over the correspondence, we are always overwhelmed by the volume of it. If you sometimes feel that we don't comment on your suggestions, or ship your order as promptly as you would like, please remember that there are often scores of other comments and orders that must be attended to.

A substantial number of you have renewed your subscription for 1964 (some of you for 1965 as well). However, some of you are procrastinators (like me). This issue will be sent to our complete 1963 subscriber list - however we will not send any future issues unless you renew. If you haven't done it - do so now. Your cheque or $2.00 in cash will bring you our newsletter through 1964.

This issue contains another of our reprint series. The article originally ran in the March 1950 edition of The Record Changer. It is by George W. Kay and is entitled 'Ragged But Right'. We also describe more fully our plans for more records by The Society and our sheet music activity. We also include with this issue an order blank to make it easy for you to order our offerings. Included as well is a questionnaire. Some of you received this last year. If you have already returned a completed one, disregard the attached one. However, if you did not, or have joined since, please complete and return it, so that we can have a better idea of your interests. As we have said before, if you have anything of interest to all the subscribers to report, send it to us. We are grateful for any submissions. Remember this is your newsletter and your sounding board.

SHEET MUSIC

As you know the Society has reprinted 22 Rags. In our last newsletter we reported the impending printing of Nos. 19, 20, 21 and 22.

Spasm Rag	-	Tom Shea
Prairie Queen	-	Tom Shea
Original Rags	-	Scott Joplin
Maple Leaf Rag	-	Scott Joplin

Tom's rags will be ready early next month for those of you who have already ordered. Our first offering was Original Rags. It was our only reprint that was 8" x 10".- whereas all other Society printings were the 'old' size 12½" x 19". When we had to re-do Original we decided to do it the proper size - and since it was going to be offered on our anniversary - to do the cover as well. This meant another page, but we felt it would add to the reprint to show the actual Hoffman copy. Even though it is available commercially, we also decided to do Maple Leaf. We have done the cover of it as well. This reprint will reproduce John Stark's first edition of 1899. (See Page 51 - They All Played Ragtime).

FROM OUR READERS

Gale Foehner of Rochester recently visited Chicago and reports: "I was in Chicago last week and looked all over for some of the old piano players that used to be there. I finally found 'Little Brother' Eustace Montgomery playing in the Old Village section, I think in a joint called 'Pickles and Peppers'. We got to talking and he invited me to play Maple Leaf as he said he had heard a lot about it, but had never heard it enough to learn it. After my nervous attempt he and Booker T. Washington, the drummer and an unknown white sax player lit into 12th St., Muleface by King Oliver, and one of his own called Freeport Farewell. He said it was written to say goodbye to a little gal down South many years ago. It was in the white ragtime style, and played very well. He makes octaves sound like an ordinary finger run, but not flashy just real deepdown jazz and blues playing. There was a ragtime pianist playing at the Village also, but it was Sunday night and the place was closed." Gale also has strong feelings about Ragtime being played by a band. We accept your offer to write us an article, and will look forward to printing it.

Percy Franks corresponds regularly. He tells us of his recent engagement at The Reef in Casper, Wyoming. Percy is now at the Gas Lamp in Omaha.

Charles Super plays Maple Leaf Rag in the Common Room of Calhoun College at Yale. Surely this proves conclusively that the present generation is not going to the dogs.

Robert Blay of Sylmar, California sent us some photos of his 'Ragtime Room'. He also brought to our attention a rather disturbing situation. We(and others)publish from time to time information that is sent to us by people who have something to offer a Ragtime enthusiast - rolls, books, records, etc. As you all know we do not accept advertisements. When we advise you of the availability of anything we do so in good

faith - but we have not necessarily checked out each offering ourselves. Robert Blay was taken by someone who offered piano rolls - took his money and didn't deliver. Please do not assume that when we report availability of something that we endorse it. In the roll department. we understand you can have complete assurance that you will get rolls and good ones from people like Larry Givens, Pat Cather and Harold Weilmeunster. This is not to say that you will be taken by anyone else,but when in doubt - check.

Robert Cantwell of New York comments: "Would it be appropriate to express some concern about the increasing amount of dialogue in the records that are being made? Gold Rush Daze and Max Morath's record have so much inane conversation in them they belong with Cohen on the Telephone. A printed accompaniment ought to be enough to provide the needed information, or, if people can't read, a separate record made up of jokes, historical misinformation and commercials". Any comments of Bob's comments?

Smiley Wallace of Joplin reports on a gathering of December 4, 1963 at Asbury School, 13 miles north of Joplin. Present were Bob Darch and The St. Louis Ragtimers Frebor Tichenor, Don Franz and Al Shiker. There was a cakewalk contest - did you win Smiley?

Paul Keller reports on a visit with Percy Franks and meeting Max Morath in Denver. Paul was playing at the Hackney House. We will look forward to hearing his own tune, Nuclear Rag.

Mr. Russell Cole of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, who refers to himself as an 'oldtimer' tells us about a radio program from WGN Chicago: "There is a radio program from WGN, Chicago, Ill. that interests this writer - not only through the musical selections offered, but because of the style of singing and playing the numbers. The program is offered daily at 9:05 to 9:30 (CT) p.m. and while the selections are most anything that has a particular appeal to oldtimers like this correspondent, and that seems to fit the name of the program, "Music for Squares", there are ragtime numbers and only last night they gave us "Twelfth Street Rag" in an arrangement or instrumentation that was altogether new and delightful to me." All we can say Mr. Cole is that we are squares too.

I don't know if any of you are Punch fans, but a few years ago there was a lively exchange in the "letters" section regarding the relative cornering merits of the Citreon and the $4\frac{1}{2}$ litre Bentley. Bill Mitchell writes his comments on previous comments by Bob Ashforth: "The November and December Newsletters were interesting and informative. I enjoyed the comments of readers. Bob Ashforth has some good observations on the rag composers, and I tend to agree with him for the most part. However, I think the number of Wenrich rags worth reprinting is rather limited. Dozens of his numbers are trite and quite forgettable, although there are four or five good ones, two of which you have reprinted. "Peaches and Cream", another goodie, is now in the Morath collection, hence available. Why not print "Sunflower Rag", if you are looking for a good Wenrich? It has a wonderful trio. "Sweetmeats" is not bad, but a cut below "Crab Apples". Anyone else care to comment on the comments on the comments?

H. B. Tuck of Hanford, California deplores that we have not given sufficient coverage to Max Morath's book of 100 Rags. We take issue Mr. Tuck - to all of you we sent a descriptive sheet on Max's book. We also told you about it in at least 4 Newsletters. We still feel it is the greatest.

Roy Carew writes us as he does from time to time. Roy as you know has been interested in Ragtime in general and Jelly Roll Morton in particular for many years. In December our reprint of the Brun Campbell story as told to R. J. Carew had an important omission. Namely that the story in question is copyright by R.J. Carew. We were able to use it through Roy's kind permission. Our apologies for neglecting to indicate his copyright and his generous permission to reprint the story.

Miss Peggy Caten of Davis, California writes requesting more information about the Beechnut Peppermint Gum commercial. Although Beechnut will not officially so state, the answer is easy Peggy. The music was written and the commercial performed by our old friend Max Morath. Peggy wrote down the music and attached it to her letter - how's that for brand recognition.

RECORDS

As you know we have produced one Ragtime Society Record. We feel it was a success. We were able to let you know about Tom Shea - his great music and his playing. We sold enough to cover expenses and pay Tom a modest royalty. We have more of RSR #1 in stock and hope to sell them. We want to produce more records in 1964. Our resources are limited. Our ability to produce records is a function of your desire to purchase them. What we want from you is your opinion. In 1964 we either can produce one or two records at $5.00 or more records(33-1/3 7" records - 3 tunes each side)at $2.00 or $2.50. What we are leaning toward is a number of 7" LP's of such things as piano rolls played at the proper speed (slow) and possibly a few new tunes by Tom Shea. If we produced 7" LP's we could offer you more records at less of a cost. What we want to know <u>now</u> is what do you think. Do you like the idea of 7" LP's or would you rather have less records but have them as 12" LP's. Please let us know before we commit our meagre resources.

ORDER FORM

Last but not least, we attach an order form. Jim Kinnear fills our orders. It takes up a considerable amount of his spare time. One great problem is back orders - so the order form. We always have Society reprints in stock - it's the commercial items that cause Jim trouble. Henceforth our plan will be as follows. With this issue we send you all a form. When you order anything we will send you a new form. You will notice that the form contains an area for substitution of commercial items. When you order items other than Society issues,please give us the opportunity to substitute so that we can make your shipment at one time.

OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Some of the published reviews of our record have appeared. We thought you would like to see what people are saying about Tom Shea.

One review is from the January '64 edition of CODA, the Canadian Jazz Magazine. The other from that fine English magazine, Jazz Journal of November 1963.

CODA

TOM SHEA

"Classic & Modern Rags"
The Ragtime Society RSR 1.

Tom Shea, a classically trained pianist, became enamoured of ragtime after seeing the TV show "Those Wonderful Ragtime Years". Determined to play the music he composed his own upon finding difficulty getting sheet music of the classic masterpieces. The somewhat astonishing results are gathered here. The first side of his record consists of originals played by the composer. There is considerable variety in mood, feeling and tempo and the compositions have genuine quality as ragtime. In addition they are superbly played by Tom Shea. He has the rare ability of making this music come to life. He is able to overcome the "mechanical" effect of the piano rolls of the originals and the usually wooden interpretations given by latter day ragtime pianists who follow the written notes of the originals. Tom Shea's playing has the necessary sparkle and his comprehensive piano technique enables him to vary his attack in a delightful manner. "Venial Sin" is a fine example of the delicate variety of shading he incorporates into his playing. In this number, too, can be heard traces of his classical touch in some of his runs. In the spryness and vigor of his playing he is somewhat reminiscent of the master jazz pianist, Jelly Roll Morton. This is noticeable in "Prairie Queen", one of the most successfull of his compositions. The more up-tempo numbers, such as "Spasm Rag","Johnny Walker Rag" and "Black Mike's Curse" are completely successful written and played compositions in the classic ragtime tradition.

The second side of the album consists of five Scott Joplin tunes and one by Tom Turpin. Most of these had never been recorded until recently, on commercial records, by piano players. Some have never before been documented in this way. Thus it affords a rare opportunity to hear such compositions as "Stoptime Rag", "Euphonic Sounds", "Something Doing","Pineapple Rag", and Original Rags" by Joplin and Tom Turpin's "St. Louis Rag". The major status of Joplin as a composer,is well illustrated here, and it is evident that Tom Shea has given much thought to the interpretation of the pieces. Thus there is a freshness to the music that makes it eminently enjoyable.

Anyone remotely interested in ragtime(the real thing, that is) will want to own this recording. - J.W.N.

(This record can be purchased direct from the Ragtime Society, P.O.Box 8, King, Ont. or through this magazine, Price $5.00.

Amongst the records recently received from America have been a few excellent items which may never be released in this country. All are worthy of searching for in the specialists shops or elsewhere.

The Ragtime Society (P.O. Box 8, King, Ontario, Canada) Have released their first LP., a 12in. by Tom Shea. One side is devoted to some of the classic rags by Joplin and Tom Turpin, the reverse is taken up by a set of originals by Shea himself. Shea is a fine ragtime player, and if the original rags he composed are not quite up to those by the old masters, the only reason is that a Joplin isn't born every day of the week.

The other item is a delightful letter that we have reproduced below. Next time I see Max I will ask him about Verne. This should be some kind of a record for keen 8 year olds.

~~Oct. 26, 1963~~
Jan. 11 '64

Dear Sir,
I would like to receive the magazine, "Easy Winners." Enclosed find two dollars. Can you send me some Ragtime music? I'm eight years old and I like to play Ragtime, on the piano.
I met Max Morath and he told me about you.
Thank you very much,

Yours truly,
Verne Hendricks

That's about all for now. We would like to hear from you regarding two matters. Your renewal, if you haven't sent it yet, and your comments on 7" LP's versus LP's. See you next month.

ragged but right

george w. kay

Much has been written about the "righteous" treatment of the ragtime music of Scott Joplin, and many enterprising recording companies have released varied interpretations of Joplin rags for the enjoyment of an ever-increasing number of appreciative followers of this music. Recently, several groups of jazz musicians have recorded some of the rags of Joplin and his contemporaries—Lu Watters' Yerba Buena Jazz Band for *Jass Man* and *West Coast*, Tony Parenti's Ragtimers for *Circle*, and a group headed by the late Mutt Carey for *Century*, to name a few.

But, although the majority of rag interpretations by such groups are fine experiments, few of their efforts can be considered authentic, or "correct" versions of Joplin rags as the composer wrote them. In giving the tunes very full jazz treatment, these musicians are often losing considerably more than they are gaining.

Study of the structure of Joplin's rags will reveal the underlying reason why his works do not lend themselves to jazz treatment as readily as, say, the rag compositions of Jelly Roll Morton. Rags were written primarily as piano music, and most of Joplin's tunes follow a rather rigid pattern, with few allowances given the interpreter to expand on the right hand melody or the strict 2/4 beat of the left hand. Since Joplin has usually employed eight notes to the measure, the jazz musician has little chance to add to it. In order to improvise, or expand on the tune, the musician is forced to alter the *basic* score.

Joplin relied on broken chords to make up the melody for the right hand, while the bass generally followed a very rigid, choppy, 2/4 time with little "ragging" for the left hand. (Exceptions to this rule can be found in the Spanish or Mexican movement employed in the tunes, *Heliotrope Bouquet* [1907], by Joplin and Louis Chauvin, and *Solace* [1909], by Joplin, the latter being advertised on the sheet music as a "Mexican Serenade.")

The ragtime styles of Tony Jackson and Jelly Roll Morton allow much more freedom for improvisation, or jazz treatment. Jackson was a pioneer in the New Orleans style of ragtime playing, which was even further broadened in scope by Morton. Both Jackson and Morton wrote and played in a two-fisted style, with many single-fingered melodies and "ragged" chords in the treble, along with some "ragging" of the bass. Consequently, the jazz musician who is far removed from the environment of the strict ragtime school can, nevertheless, acquit himself admirably when he tackles a Jackson or a Morton rag. The hot jazz musician can have a "ball" with such a tune as Morton's *Frog-i-more*, the original manuscript of which is simplicity itself, being merely the basic melody without embellishments.

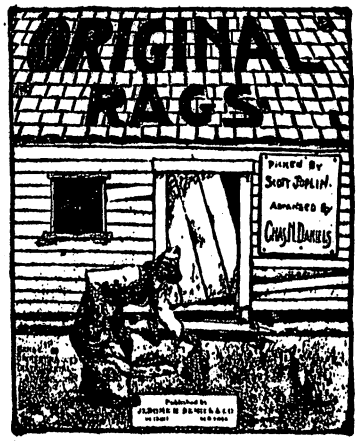
Returning to the question of the "correct" interpretation of Joplin's rags—as the composer intended them to be played—attention is directed to the solemn warning, "Do not play fast," which appears very conspicuously on most of his compositions. The best versions of the classic *Maple Leaf* are played at moderate speed, and the delightful chord variations can be felt to the utmost. And the most attractive recorded examples of *Maple Leaf* would seem to be piano solos—not band versions.

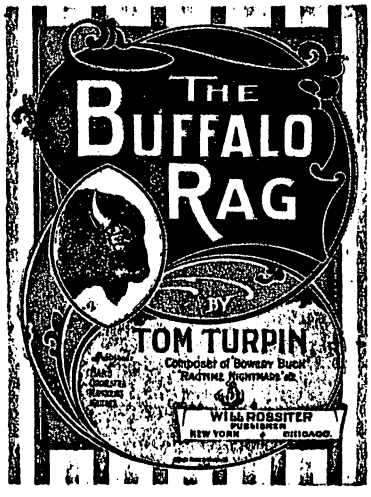
An excellent recorded example of *Maple Leaf* is the piano solo by S. Brunson Campbell, issued first as a Joplin Memorial record and later by *West Coast*. There is something wonderfully nostalgic and "right" in this tinkly version; obviously Campbell endeavored to capture Joplin's style and interpretation to the letter. One of the most delightfully melodic passages of the piece is the fourth part, generally missed or discarded completely by other artists, but retained by Campbell. There are no frills, no added figures, no undue "ragging" of the left hand. It is the playing of a worshipful pupil following the instructions of his teacher, exactly as Brun Campbell was taught the intricacies of the ragtime piano years ago in Sedalia, Mo., by Scott Joplin.

Another "correct," or "right" treatment of the piano version of *Maple Leaf* is that played by Roy J. Carew, of Washington, D. C. This 65-year-old authority on New Orleans life, Jelly Roll Morton, and published ragtime tunes, has also written several fine rags, many of which seem to combine the influences of Joplin, Jackson, and Morton. (One particularly noteworthy tune is *Full Moon*, which dates back to 1909.) The Jackson influence is easily understandable, since Roy spent many hours during his youth in the French Quarter of New Orleans listening to Tony play and sing.

Perhaps the most heartening and stimulating recent influences in the cause of ragtime have been the efforts of two young pianists, Wally Rose and Ralph Sutton. Rose is relatively well known for his many fine rags on *Jass Man* and *West Coast* records. Sutton has been very favorably received in New York and a recent *Circle* album has given further prominence to his expert ragtime piano

(*Continued on Page* 12)





ragged but right

style. Particularly noteworthy is a breath-taking piano solo of *Dill Pickles*.

Available recorded examples of band versions of Joplin rags reveal even wider departure from the classic interpretation than is evidenced in recorded piano versions. For apparently it is much more difficult to assemble a group of jazz musicians who have the ability, or the desire, to play within the limited framework of Joplin's compositions, and certainly the reluctance of jazz musicians to subject themselves to the strict discipline of a written score is understandable. Sidney Bechet and his New Orleans Feetwarmers played a hot, fast version of *Maple Leaf* for *Blue Bird,* which departs drastically from the classic rag idiom. We are not questioning Bechet's ability, and his treatment might be more to the liking of the jazz enthusiast than the real thing. We do maintain, however, that in such a version, a great deal of the innate beauty of the Joplin score is lost.

A step in the right direction has been the commendable work of Lu Watters and his Yerba Buena Band in their ragtime recordings. There is an unmistakable sincerity expressed in their playing of ragtime music from full band arrangements, as well as in the piano and rhythm versions featuring Wally Rose. (But the band version of *Maple Leaf* offers no fair basis of comparison because of an unfortunate and deplorable recording job.)

An ardent student of ragtime music, who should receive recognition in this field, is Don Fowler, 29-year-old native of Portland, Oregon, and a trumpeter of considerable ability. (He will be recalled as collaborator with Roy Carew in the series on Scott Joplin which appeared in the *Record Changer* in September, October, and December, 1944.) During a considerable portion of the time Fowler was in the army, he was stationed near Washington, D. C. Don had been collecting ragtime sheet music for several years, and took advantage of the opportunity to search the music section of the Library of Congress for remote copies of ragtime tunes. It was natural enough for Fowler to meet Roy Carew, and these two champions of the music of Scott Joplin got together on many occasions to discuss and play the obscure rags resurrected from the archives of the Library. On one occasion, with Carew at the piano and Fowler on trumpet, a limited number of home recordings were made, on Gordon Gullickson's machine, of Joplin and Morton tunes, as well as a few Carew compositions.

After the war, Fowler undertook to organize a group of local musicians to play his orchestrations of famous rags. The personnel included Fowler, trumpet, George Phillips and Dave Robbins, trombones, Gene Morningstar, clarinet, Lee Stafford, piano, and Richard "Tiny" Harrison, drums. Three members of the band, Fowler, Phillips, and Robbins, were staff musicians in the local symphony orchestra.

During the latter part of 1947, the band made a set of private recordings of Fowler's ragtime scores. These recordings, cut entirely for kicks, came off surprisingly well. The numbers were: *Maple Leaf, Entertainer, Ragtime Dance, Easy Winners* (all composed by Joplin), *Watermelon Trust* (H. C. Thompson), *New Orleans Honky Tonk* (Carew). The stars of the session were Fowler, with his clear, lyrical trumpet lead, and Phillips, who provided forceful and exciting execution of the trombone parts. Possibly Phillips' training in playing bass trombone parts in symphony orchestrations accounted for his adaptability in executing Fowler's scores. Their work gives the recordings an authentic, "right" flavor which places them in the category of the unusual. Although technical flaws would make commercial release of these recordings unfeasible, the spontaneity and spirit so necessary in ragtime interpretation are present in abundance.

Unfortunately, the group was forced to disband when Fowler left Portland early this year to study music in Paris. Before departing, Fowler sent copies of the recorded works of the band to his friend, Roy Carew, who can on occasion be coaxed to extract these delightfully "correct" ragtime records from his vast collection, to play them for the enjoyment of the lover of ragtime music.

There is, clearly, much room for further serious study of the concepts of ragtime interpretation, particularly from the orchestral standpoint, along the lines indicated by Don Fowler and his fellow-musicians. Certainly Fowler's efforts indicate that one possible source of "correct" treatment of ragtime tunes may lie with the musician who has been schooled in a classical environment and the rigid discipline of interpretation of written scores, pure tone, and correct pitch. In any case, the fact that the nucleus of Fowler's group was composed of members of a symphony orchestra, with such training, does not appear to have hindered in any way their interpretation of the ragtime tunes of Joplin and the others.

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